



## Basic Training

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Puppy training should begin from the moment you bring your new pet home –it will go much faster and smoother when you begin when your pet is young. Early training can help in such important areas as communicating with your pet, training your pet to respond to signals and commands, socializing, and preventing unruly behavior. A great way to get started is to enroll her in a puppy class, many of which begin for dogs as young as 8 weeks. Positive training methods are important for successful training. Using punishment during a puppy’s formative months can ruin the bond with your pet, and can also lead to fearful, defensive, and even aggressive reactions. Instead, use positive reinforcement to facilitate the training process. The best reinforcers for training and shaping desirable behavior are food, a favored toy, affection, and social attention.

### Getting Started

The healthiest choice for a reward is the puppy’s own food, combined with praise. Training just prior to the puppy’s mealtime can help increase his/her interest in the food. Special treats may be needed if your pet has a picky appetite.

Initially, the food reward should be given immediately following every correct response. As the pup learns the behavior, stop giving a food reward for less than exact responses, and reward only quick, well-performed responses. Once you’ve reached your goal, continue to give praise for every correct response but begin to provide the food reward on a more intermittent, random basis. This will result in the longest retention of learning.

### “Come”

Hold a piece of dry food between your thumb and forefinger, extend toward the pup, and say his/her name. As they approach you, repeatedly wave your hand toward your chest and say “come.” This gives your pet both verbal and visual cues. When he/she reaches you, give them the food. As they eat, quickly take a few steps back and repeat the process. An alternate way to teach this command is to toss the first piece of food six to eight feet away for the pup to chase. After the pup eats it, say “come” to call her back to you for another piece of food.

### “Sit”

Start with the pup in a standing position. Hold a piece of food between your thumb and forefinger, place it directly in front of her nose, and say her name. Slowly move the food over her head so the nose points straight up and her rear end is leveraged into a sitting position. Say “sit” as they assume the position and



give a treat. Be careful not to hold the food too high above their head or they will jump for the food. After some practice, your puppy should automatically sit with an upward sweep of the hand or when you say the word “sit,” even without showing the food. Also use this lure technique to train your dog to sit up from a lying-down position by simply holding the food in front of her nose and sweeping it up over her head so she rises to the sitting position.

### **“Lie Down”**

Teaching your dog to lie down on command is easier if you begin on a smooth surface with the puppy in sitting position. Hold a piece of dry food directly in front of her nose. Say his/her name and, with a swift movement, move the food down to the floor directly next to her paws. As your dog slides into the down position, say “down” and give the food reward. This command usually takes a little more patience than the first two. Be careful to move the food to the floor right next to the paws. If the food is too far in front of the pup, she may stand and walk to the food. With time, the downward sweep of your hand of the word “down” will cause the pup to go into the down position.

### **“Stay”**

The “stay” command will be the most difficult command for your puppy to learn. Young puppies don’t like to sit still for very long and love to follow people around. Keep this in mind when you begin training. Train when your puppy is calm, possibly after a long walk or play session. Have him/her sit by using a hand and a verbal signal, but do not give a food reward. As soon as the puppy is sitting, lean toward them, look them in the eye, and extend the palm of your hand toward them. In a calm, firm voice say “stay.” Wait only one second, then lean down, calmly praise them, and give the food reward while they are still sitting, then say “okay” to release them. Repeat the exercise. Gradually request that the pup stay for longer periods of time. If your puppy’s eyes wander from yours, calmly repeat “stay” in a serious tone as you lean toward them. Increase your distance, beginning with one step away. Once your pet understands the concept, progress slowly to longer stays and greater distances.

### **“Drop It” or “Leave It”**

Possessive behavior or guarding of food, toys, or stolen items is related to how strongly your dog wants to keep what they have. It is not related to how he/she feels about you. Should your puppy display any aggression, seek immediate guidance from your veterinarian. To help prevent guarding, the first step is to teach the puppy to give up objects for rewards of higher value. Begin with a toy that is of minimal appeal and teach your dog to give it to you by trading it for a tasty piece of kibble. Initially, you should present the food and say “drop it” while the dog has the object in her mouth. Each time thereafter, do not show the food when you say “drop it,” and give it to your dog only after he/she drops the object. Once he/she reliably drops objects on command for food, switch to intermittent food reinforcement (offer praise each time and food only occasionally). After the pet willingly gives up toys of minimal appeal, progress to practicing the “drop” command with toys that are more attractive to them and tastier treats as rewards. Clicker training (a clicking sound is associated with a food reward) can also be a very effective way to reward your dog for dropping – simply monitor your dog closely until she drops the object and then immediately click and reward the behavior.

## Meal Time

Although it is best not to bother your dog during meals, it is important that the dog does not feel threatened when family members are around. To this end, have your dog sit while you prepare his/her food and place it on the floor. Then call your dog to come and eat. During feeding, approach your dog once or twice, interrupt with a “sit” or “come” command, then lift up the food bowl, put a special treat in it, and give it back. Another exercise is to have the dog sit, place about 10 percent of the meal in the bowl, and have them come and eat. As soon as they are finished, have your dog sit, then pick up the bowl and add another 10 percent. Repeat, and occasionally add a special treats, until your pup eats all the food. To reduce any threat the dog might feel when people come near while they are eating, occasionally drop a special treat into the bowl as you walk by. If your dog shows any threat, consult your veterinarian. Never punish a puppy for growling while at their dinner bowl.

## Additional tips

Here are some additional tips to make great progress during basic training. Patience, consistency and repetition are key!

- Start training in a quiet area. When the puppy’s responses to your commands become dependable, move the training to environments with more distractions.
- Be sure the pet knows one command before proceeding to the next. Tone of voice is important. When teaching “come,” “sit,” and “down,” use a calm, positive, and consistent tone of voice to command the behavior and a high-pitched happy tone as a reward. “Stay” works better with a slow, deep-toned command.
- Avoid repeating commands. If you do not teach your puppy to respond to the first command, they will learn that it is not necessary to obey until multiple commands are given. If he/she doesn’t respond, you can gently guide them into the requested position, then, be sure to have a few more training sessions before making the command in a non-training situation.
- Praise your puppy and say “good dog” whenever you give a food reward. This will reinforce desired behavior and help maintain a strong response, even as the food reward is gradually withdrawn.
- A dog is more likely to respond if you use both hand and verbal signals rather than only a verbal command.
- Enroll in a puppy class so you can get guidance from the instructors and your puppy can learn in the presence of the other dogs.
- When your puppy seems fidgety and has a shorter attention span, keep the training session short and stop before the pup begins ignoring commands.
- If you have difficulty getting your puppy to be calm and focused, a head halter should be considered to more immediately – but gently – guide them into the desired position.